

James Baldwin's French: The Case of *Giovanni's Room*

ABSTRACT

This article is an analysis of **bilingualism** in **James Baldwin's** 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room*. It is based on bibliographical and archival material, asking how significant amounts of a foreign language (French) are incorporated into a novel written principally in another language (English). It shows how (and, to some extent, why) much of the French is inaccurate in both pre-publication typescript materials and in many published editions, except, interestingly, in the first UK edition (1957), which is spectacularly accurate. It also considers the challenge of translating a bilingual novel into its secondary language, examining the first French **translation** by Élisabeth Guinsbourg (1997).

As Michele Elam makes clear, Baldwin is 'one of the most important writers and cultural critics of the twentieth century'.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the essays in her *Companion* to his writing seek 'to capture the power and influence of his work during the civil rights era as well as his relevance in the "post-race" transnational twenty-first century' (p. 3). His second, and arguably most famous novel, *Giovanni's Room* is referred to as 'foundational within black queer studies' (p. 2), and Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman's essay, in the same volume, devoted largely to this novel, explores it as a text 'concerned deeply with racial, gendered, and sexual hierarchies within the

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<sup>1</sup> Michele Elam, Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. by Michele Elam (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 1.

capitalist economy of a stratified social sphere.’<sup>2</sup> This is a proper perspective in which to explore Baldwin, especially given the quantity and importance of his essayistic writing over and above his creative writing. And yet his ‘powerful eloquent prose’ (p. 3) is more often acknowledged by critics than it is explored in any detail.<sup>3</sup> It is to redress the balance that this article aims to scrutinize a key stylistic feature of *Giovanni’s Room* – its frequent use of French words and phrases. This creates many problems for author, editors, readers and translators of the novel, and some of these are examined here in order to shed light on the workings of bilingualism in this particular novel.

First published in the USA in 1956 and in the United Kingdom in 1957, James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* is a first-person narrative of sexual discovery and catastrophe. The American narrator, David, leaves for Paris ‘to find [himself]’ (p. 18).<sup>4</sup> In Paris, he begins a sexual relationship with the American woman Hella, whom he meets in a bar (p. 4). After she goes travelling in Spain, he begins another relationship with the Italian barman Giovanni and moves into his room. It is, indirectly, thanks to his ‘old acquaintance’ Jacques, ‘an aging, Belgian-born, American businessman’ (p. 20) that he meets Giovanni, at the counter of Jacques’s favourite bar, owned by Guillaume, ‘one of the oldest names in France’ (p. 133). After Hella’s return from Spain, David leaves Giovanni and eventually persuades Hella to move with him to a rented house in Provence ‘just outside a small summer

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<sup>2</sup> Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, “‘As Though a Metaphor were Tangible’”: Baldwin’s Identities’, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 164–79 (p. 167).

<sup>3</sup> Elam, Introduction to *Cambridge Companion*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

resort' (pp. 3-4), 'in the middle of nowhere' (p. 144). She leaves him for the USA after finding him with a sailor in what would now be called a gay bar in Nice. 'I wasn't lying to you [...] I was lying to myself,' he tries to explain (p. 144). He is left to ruminate on the truth: the truth of his homosexuality, the truth of his love for Giovanni, the truth of his feelings of guilt. He wonders whether Giovanni would have fatally strangled Guillaume to death and received the death penalty if David had not left him. Apart from an evocation of David's youth in the USA in the early part of the novel, the action is set in France and narrated from the perspective of Provence, where the action ends, as, we assume, David takes the first steps on his journey back to the USA.

This account of *Giovanni's Room* privileges geography and nationality, and therefore, by implication, linguistic allegiance. It is not obvious how to write, in one language (English), a novel in the realist tradition in which characters live in a country where a different language is spoken (French). David's narrative is in English, but, when he uses direct speech, he evokes situations in which sometimes English and sometimes French may be spoken. Presumably David and Hella speak to each other in English; David and Jacques speak English to each other ('though [Giovanni] spoke no English, he knew that we [David and Jacques] had been speaking about him', p. 26), but we might assume that Jacques is bilingual in French and English ('Jacques translated his [English] question [into French]', p. 26); Giovanni must speak French, since there is no suggestion that any other character speaks Italian, and 'he spoke no English' (p. 26); and similarly Guillaume must speak French. David's communications with Giovanni, Guillaume, Jacques (at least when in French-speaking company), his landlady in Provence and (in the absence of other evidence) the sailor in Nice must be in French. None of this linguistic detail is spelt

out in the narrative and it would no doubt have been tedious if it had been. But Baldwin crafts the narrative in such a way as to conjure up the duality of the characters' linguistic transactions. *Giovanni's Room* is a novel that contains a good deal of French, but with one particularity: much of it is highly erratic.

The following analyses are deliberately based on the readily available 2007 Penguin Books edition that most readers, in the UK at least, are likely to use today. All quotations are reproduced exactly as they appear in this edition (errors included), unless I indicate that I am quoting from a different edition or from a typescript of the novel. The following questions are addressed in turn:

1. In what ways and to what effect does Baldwin introduce French into the narrative?
2. What is the quality of the French used and why is it so often erratic? The question is addressed through an analysis of bibliographical and archival evidence.
3. What problems arise from the use of a 'secondary' language in a novel when the novel is subsequently translated into that secondary language? This is answered with reference to the French translation by Élisabeth Guinsbourg.<sup>5</sup>

### *Use of French*

Thinking particularly of literary texts, Meir Sternberg asks the question as to 'how to represent the reality of polylingual discourse through a communicative medium that is normally unilingual'.<sup>6</sup> Whilst many literary texts represent a unilingual world for a

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<sup>5</sup> James Baldwin, *La Chambre de Giovanni*, trans. by Élisabeth Guinsbourg (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1997). Quotations are taken from the 2015 edition.

<sup>6</sup> Meir Sternberg, 'Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis', *Poetics Today*, 2-4 (1981), 221-39.

unilingual audience, many also attempt to represent a bilingual or polylingual world for an audience that may or may not have more than one language. Sternberg identifies two ends of a spectrum of possibilities on which writers can situate themselves. At one extreme, they can depict a world in which every utterance appears in the language in which it would plausibly appear in real life (vehicular matching, in her terminology (p. 223) ; at the other end, they can adopt what she calls a homogenizing convention (p. 223), according to which the text, though unilingual, makes it clear that some of the words and phrases are to be understood to be uttered in another language. In *Giovanni's Room* Baldwin avoids both extremes but goes some modest way towards vehicular matching. In doing so, he adopts a key strategy identified by Sternberg, 'selective reproduction', a 'form of intermittent quotation of the original heterolingual discourse' (p. 225). She calls it the '*pars-pro-toto*' principle (p. 226). A word or two in a foreign language can be enough to suggest that a whole sentence should be understood to be in that language.

Sternberg's perspective may imply that foreign words or phrases are most likely to occur in dialogue alleged to be spoken in a foreign language. But they can occur most straightforwardly in a narrative whose narrator is not a native speaker of that language. The most straightforward technique is the use of foreign place names. David's narrative effortlessly evokes Paris with a few proper nouns: Les Halles (p. 39, p. 93, p. 131); Opéra (p. 79); Odéon (p. 102); place de la Concorde (p. 83). Two streets are mentioned: the rue des Pyramides (p. 83) and the rue de Tournon (p. 107); a restaurant, the *Closerie des Lilas* (p. 84), and a hotel, *Le Crillon* (p. 105).<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> In this account I have followed Baldwin's own typographical practice. Whereas generally throughout the work he italicizes French words, he keeps place names in

action set in the south is more limited in its geographical reference, restricted essentially to the names of towns, like Èze (p. 130), Nice and Cannes (p. 140).

Also contributing imperceptibly to the evocation of a foreign setting is a relatively frequent recourse to words loaned from French (whether in narrative or dialogue). Typically these are not italicized: for example, ‘habitué’s’ (p. 23, p. 69), ‘bistros’ (p. 42), ‘cafes’ (p. 84) or ‘cafés’ (with the accent, p. 107), ‘aperitif’ (p. 96). ‘Chic’ is sometimes italicized (p. 47), sometimes not (p. 43). Even though thoroughly assimilated into English, ‘*nouveau riche*’ (p. 47), ‘*double-entendre*’ (p. 52), ‘*hoteliers*’ (p. 68), and ‘*pied-à-terre*’ (p. 95) appear in italics, as does the Spanish word ‘*torero*’ (p. 70), assimilated into both French and English.

Given that the key character Giovanni, with whom the narrator David has a relationship, is said explicitly to know no English and that the two of them frequently interact with the bar owner Guillaume (on whose competence in English the narrator makes no comment) and the (admittedly) bilingual Jacques, it follows that many of their exchanges must be presumed to take place in French. The most obvious and most frequent way in which Baldwin aims to evoke French dialogue is by incorporating simple French words into exchanges that are for the most part presented in English. Even an incomplete list of the words reveals the very elementary level of French that Baldwin expects his readers to have. These are words that occur in the early stages of any French course (reproduced here as they appear in the text): for example, ‘*Et toi*’ (p. 28), ‘*A la votre*’ (p. 29), ‘*peut-être*’ (p. 31), ‘*Mais oui*’ (p. 43),

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roman type, except for the name of the restaurant and hotel and, curiously and inexplicably, *Nation* (p. 40, p. 56).

'*Bien sûr*' (p. 43), '*ici*' (p. 43), '*Tiens*' (p. 45), '*Enchanté, Madame*' (p. 46), '*Bon*' (p. 127), '*Au revoir*' (p. 128).

These words or short phrases are sometimes extended into slightly more complex syntactic forms and/or combined with vocabulary that is not necessarily elementary but instantly comprehensible to anglophone readers: for example, '*Vive l'amerique [...] vive le vieux continent*' (p. 33), '*Fais-moi confiance*' (p. 43), '*je prendrai un petit cognac*' (p. 51), '*Viens m'embrasser*' (p. 105), '*Qui est là?*' (p. 119), '*C'est vrai*' (p. 136).

Occasionally, Baldwin ventures a linguistically simple dialogue in French, without recourse to any English except for the narrative:

'*Eh bien,*' he said, '*il te plait?*'

'*Comment?*' I said. (p. 35)

Often he uses either syntactically or lexically more complex language in his dialogues than in the example above and in these cases he deftly incorporates a translation or a paraphrase either just before or just after the French phrase. Sternberg identifies this technique precisely as one which avoids the need for fully bilingual competence on the part of the audience. She calls it 'intratextual "dual-language" rendition, where the heterolingual source or its narratorial translation is parenthetically super-added' (p. 226). In the following examples the translation is given first. The narrator recalls something that the non-anglophone Giovanni had said to him: "'Me, I want to escape,' he had told me, '*je veuz m'evader*'" (p. 21). Giovanni again, speaking to the narrator: 'All except you. *Tous, sauf toi.*' (p. 93). And again: 'He fired me [...] *Il m'a mis à la porte*' (p. 94).

Sometimes the translation or the paraphrase follows the French. A French man warns the narrator: '*T'aura du chagrin* [...] You will be very unhappy. Remember

that I told you so.’ (p. 36). Guillaume wants Mme Clothilde to offer a particular young man a drink, so says to her: ‘*Et le rouquin la!* What’s the redhead drinking?’ (p. 51). The adjectival noun ‘*rouquin*’, which could not be described as elementary French, is translated.

Occasionally, what may be thought to be lexically or syntactically more complex speech is *not* translated. When Giovanni pleads with the narrator, ‘*Ne me laisse pas tomber, je t’en prie*’ (p. 93), no translation is offered; nor when Giovanni is suggesting that there are other rooms they might live in, ‘*Ca ne manque, les chambres*’ (p. 104). But by far the most common occurrences of non-translation are vulgarisms, and this is interesting, because it suggests a certain prudishness, or at least prudence, on Baldwin’s part. He is willing to use the vulgarism in French but avoids translating it even though many of his anglophone readers without advanced French would not easily understand. Words include: ‘*merde*’ (p. 31), ‘*les fesses*’ (p. 43), ‘*salaud*’, (p. 45), ‘*canaille*’ (p. 45), ‘*vache*’ (p. 47, p. 55), ‘*tapette*’ (p. 96, p. 132), ‘*salop*’ (p. 97). Baldwin does, however, on two occasions translate such words. Here two French vulgarisms sandwich their English paraphrase: ‘*Les encules! The dirty sons-of-bitches! Les gonzesses!*’ (p.97). And ‘*Va te faire foutre*’ (p. 35), if not exactly accompanied by a translation, occurs in a context in which, several lines previously, a similar sentiment has been expressed in English: ‘Go to hell’ (p. 35).

Though the narrator, an anglophone American, may want to use French words and phrases in the dialogues of his francophone characters, there is no need for him to use any in his own English narrative, and yet he frequently does so, bolstering for readers the impression of a foreign setting. Often these words have cultural connotations which might also justify their use: for example, ‘*vin chaud*’ (p. 21), ‘*patron*’ (p. 23, p. 46), ‘*quartier*’ (p. 24), ‘*garçon de café*’ (p. 39), ‘*pissoirs*’ (p. 42),

'*carte d'identité*' (p. 129). Most odd, however, is '*arrêt*' (p. 129): there would have been no loss of connotation had the narrator retained 'bus stop'.

The reader grows accustomed to reading a text in English that depicts francophone characters sometimes speaking French. This is conveyed by the insertion of French words and phrases into their speech, highlighted by italicization. 'Changes of addressee may result in a change of code [language].'<sup>8</sup> In making this observation on multilingual texts, Mark Sebba is most obviously referring to the way in which speakers will adopt the language most appropriate to their addressee. Sometimes, however, in *Giovanni's Room* there is more going on, especially when interlocutors who are native speakers of English switch code in mid utterance.

When the narrator picks up the American woman Sue on a café terrace, he tells her falsely that he lives alone, but that sometimes a Frenchman, 'when his mistress throws him out, [...] bunks with me for a couple of days' (p. 86). 'Ah!' she sighed. '*Chagrin d'amour!*' (p. 86). Readers may think that the characters are speaking in English but enriching their expression with recourse to idiomatic phrases drawn from the linguistic culture around them.

This is particularly so for the narrator's relationship with his fiancée Hella. She sends him a letter from Spain: '*Mon cher*, she began, *Spain is my favourite country* mais ça n'empêche que Paris est toujours ma ville préférée' (p. 83). Notwithstanding the confusion over the use of roman and italic type, Hella's insertion

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Sebba, 'Researching and Theorising Multi-lingual Texts' in Mark Sebba, Shahrzad Mahottian and Carla Jonsson (eds), *Language Mixing and Code-switching in Writing: Approaches to Mixed Language Written Discourse* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–26.

of French phrases into an English text addressed to her compatriot signals her desire to form a unique linguistic bond with him through bilingual communication.<sup>9</sup> She does this in person too, immediately upon stepping off the train from Spain: ‘*Eh bien,*’ she said, ‘*t’embrasse pas ta femme?*’ (p. 106). Not only does this phrase imply a momentary hesitation on the narrator’s part, but the fact that she speaks French once again evokes the special relationship she thinks she has with him; and more than that, it allows her (as English would not) to use the ambiguous, and therefore suggestive, word ‘*femme*’. She is his fiancée, with the clear intention of becoming his wife.

The most unusual, and witty, use of French in a communication between two native speakers of English occurs in the letter that the narrator writes to his father in the USA. Short of cash, he is emboldened to ask that some be sent, confident that his father will be pleased with the news of his intended marriage: ‘*Now will you send your loving son some of his hard-earned money. Tout de suite. That’s French for pronto.*’ (p. 110). The peremptory nature of the request is compensated for by the jokiness of his use of French (when the reader has no reason to believe that his father knows any French at all) and by its translation, not into English, but into an Italian word current in American linguistic culture.

Whilst it could be argued that these examples of French, in situations when it is far from necessary for communication between the characters involved, may none the less promote the illusion of reality, they also, by being in excess of requirement,

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<sup>9</sup> The confusion concerns the italicization of ‘*Mon cher*’. To signal that this is a letter, the text of the letter is in italics and Hella’s use of French in the phrase beginning ‘*mais ça n’empêche*’ is conversely in roman type. Logically ‘*Mon cher*’ should also be in roman type but is not.

show that Baldwin is highly self-conscious in his use of French in the novel. These same examples underscore Sternberg's point that there can be no simple matrix for writing a polylingual text: 'Each work inherits and establishes a certain range of heterolingual [...] representation: and it is the interplay of possible and actual, conventional and innovative forms that determine its realistic effect'.<sup>10</sup>

This is also evident in some observations the narrator makes about linguistic choices. This is how, early on, the narrator evokes his social circle in Paris: 'Most of the people I knew in Paris were, as Parisians sometimes put it, of *le milieu* and, while this milieu was certainly anxious enough to claim me, I was intent on proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company.' (p. 20). How much this would mean to a reader unfamiliar with French is not obvious. He is of course referring to homosexual circles. But he chooses the French euphemism, '*le milieu*', and distances himself from it by attributing it to Parisians. Then, instead of glossing its connotations, he simply repeats the word, shorn of its italics, so that it now looks like an English word, the meaning of which should be, but is not, transparent. Baldwin is showing the initiated reader, through this linguistic play, how uncomfortable the narrator is with his sexuality.

Baldwin repeats the same trick towards the end of the novel after Guillaume has been murdered and after many of his clients have been picked up by the police. 'They were picked up on suspicion of having what the French, with a delicacy I take to be sardonic, call *les goûts particuliers*. These "tastes", which do not constitute a crime in France, are nevertheless regarded with extreme disapprobation by the bulk of the populace.' (p. 132). Once again, the narrator reveals his continuing discomfort with his sexuality by having recourse to another French euphemism, which he

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<sup>10</sup> Sternberg, 'Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis', p. 234.

translates simply as ‘tastes’. These examples, far from simply supporting the illusion of reality, show Baldwin using a linguistic choice to reveal indirectly to readers the narrator’s lack of ease with his sexuality – the cause of the catastrophes in his own and others’ lives.

This point is pursued further by Margaret Sönser Breen, who interprets the narrator’s use of French words and phrases as a strategy of evasion attributed to him by Baldwin.<sup>11</sup> David may avoid translating certain words or phrases into English so that he does not have to confront his homosexuality too directly in his own language. This would therefore convey a latent homophobia, explaining his retention of ‘*le milieu*’ (p. 20), ‘*les folles*’ (p. 24), and ‘*les goûts particuliers*’ (p. 132). Breen also sees the retention of French in exchanges between David and Sue (p. 90) and Hella and David (p. 83) as suggestive of the cultural privilege of the white American. By offering no translation of a phrase like ‘*les folles*’, Breen thinks that David ‘keeps himself separate from the homosexual sub-culture he encounters’.<sup>12</sup> His failure to translate all his French into English indicates a failure to accept his gay identity. This is an attractive line of argument, but it does not address the fact that there are many innocuous words and phrases that David leaves in French and that, for Baldwin, serve as little more than local colour. It does not acknowledge that some of the potentially suggestive French words do appear with the suggestion of a translation alongside them, like ‘*Les encules! The dirty sons of bitches! Les gonzesses!*’ (p. 97). ‘Dirty sons of bitches’ is at least a partial indication of the force of the two French words. And

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<sup>11</sup> Margaret Sönser Breen, ‘Translation Failure in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*’ in *Queer in Translation*, ed. by B. J. Epstein and Robert Gillett (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 64–76.

<sup>12</sup> Breen, ‘Translation Failure’, p. 67.

finally Breen's argument does not acknowledge the role of Baldwin's first publisher who, as we shall see, was responsible simultaneously for both increasing and decreasing the quantity of French in the published version of the text.

### *Linguistic Accuracy*

According to his biographer David Leeming, on entering Frederick Douglass Junior High School in 1935, aged 11, Baldwin was particularly influenced by his teacher Countee Cullen, a graduate of New York University and Harvard and a celebrated black poet:

Cullen had been to France and he knew French. [...] Baldwin learnt his first bits of French, a language in which he later became fluent, in Countee Cullen's French class at Frederick Douglass, and he always said that his dream of going to France originated with Cullen.<sup>13</sup>

It is not clear what formal instruction he received in French at school, or its extent. But in a public address at the University of California Berkeley in 1979 he recognized that he had known very little when he first left for France in 1948 and that, paradoxically, the experience of being in France taught him to hear, for the first time, 'the beat of the black English with which he had grown up'.<sup>14</sup> He quickly acquired a circle of friends in Paris, but they were American. According to Leeming, he 'was sometimes bothered by a sense of his isolation in the American community from French people other than the desperate ones he picked up at the Fiacre or the Reine Blanche' establishments characterized by Leeming as 'homosexual bars that would

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<sup>13</sup> David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), pp. 21–22.

<sup>14</sup> Leeming, *Baldwin*, p. 342.

later become the models for Guillaume's in *Giovanni's Room*'.<sup>15</sup> Baldwin's essay 'Equal in Paris', first published in his *Notes of a Native Son* in 1955, recounts the story of his arrest and imprisonment in December 1949 after being found in his hotel room in Paris with a sheet stolen (not by him) from a different hotel, and includes remarks on the standard of his French. He claims that when he arrived in Paris in 1948 he had 'no grasp whatever of the French language'.<sup>16</sup> He mentions the requirement to sign the *procès-verbal* taken at the police station: 'One had, of course, no choice but to sign it, even though my mastery of written French was very far from certain' (*Notes*, p.150). He mentions the recourse to an interpreter for him and his American friend (also a suspect) in the courtroom: 'Even if our French had been better than it was we would not have been allowed to stand trial without an interpreter' (p. 158). He mentions asking to attend Mass on Christmas day and listening to a Frenchman 'preaching in this language which I did not understand' (p. 160). Notwithstanding these claims, he also says that he told the story of *l'affaire du drap de lit* to the French men with whom he shared his prison cell and elicited 'only the wildest amusement or the most suspicious disbelief' (p. 154). He was clearly able to communicate in French, but probably imperfectly. His French would certainly have improved significantly as a result of his affair with the young Swiss man Lucien Happersberger, who knew no English. They seem to have met in December 1949 and became intimate: 'Jimmy and Lucien met every evening. [...] Baldwin's French improved and so did Lucien's English. The two men became so close that Baldwin's need of an entourage diminished'.<sup>17</sup> Although the affair did not last, they remained

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<sup>15</sup> Leeming, *Baldwin*, p. 61, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> Leeming, *Baldwin*, p. 75.

close for many years and Baldwin became the godfather of Lucien's son, Luc James (p. 82). In the years leading up to the publication of *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin was based mostly in Paris, but with visits back to the USA in 1952 and 1954-55. It is likely that the novel was conceived in France, but mostly written in the USA.

Baldwin's French was probably a mixture of schoolboy French, French picked up in casual social encounters in Paris, and French deriving from his more sustained interactions with Happersberger. It is strikingly erratic. There are about 50 errors in the French in *Giovanni's Room*. Given that one of the most obvious effects of French in the novel is to bolster the illusion of reality in the depiction of a partially bilingual community, erratic French risks imperilling the illusion, at least for readers who are competent in the language. It may be possible to argue that, on occasion, error supports the illusion. When the non-native user of French Hella writes a letter to the narrator and tells him that Paris is her 'ville préfér ' (p. 83), the reader may be inclined to think that Hella's written French is imperfect, which could excuse the missing acute accents on the first two 'e's in the adjective and the missing feminine agreement. But this argument cannot be made in other cases. Moreover, given that erratic accentuation and adjectival agreement are recurrent problems, it is extremely unlikely that Baldwin writes 'pr fer ' deliberately to suggest that Hella's written French is poor. It is more likely that there is an issue with either Baldwin's own French and/or that of his editors.

The most common errors concern spelling, and accentuation is a particular issue. Missing acute accents: for example, 'evader' (p. 21), 'cheri' (p. 28), 'amerique' (p. 33), 'marche' (p. 42: the absence of accent here changes the pronunciation and sense of this word), 'c'etait' (p. 52), 'encules' (p. 97: again, the absence of accent affects the pronunciation, and changes the part of speech). Missing grave accents:

'une fine a l'eau' (p. 26), 'tres' (p. 42), 'la' (p. 51: the adverb 'là' is intended, not the feminine form of the definite article). Missing circumflexes: 'A la votre' (p. 29), 'il te plait' (p. 35), 'vous n'etes pas malade' (p. 58), 'gouts' (p. 132). Missing cedillas: 'ca ne manque' (p. 104), 'ca va' (p. 129). Missing hypens: 'comment vas tu' (p. 28), 'comprendstu' (p. 28), 'Et le rouquin la' (p. 51). Or redundant hyphens: 'parce-qu'il m'adorait' (p. 95). Missing capitalization: 'l'amerique' (p. 33), 'l'americain' (p. 46).

Accentuation apart, very few words are straightforwardly misspelt. There is the missing 'i' in 'veille folle' (p. 28), the intruding 'r' in 'mérchant' (p. 105). Other spelling errors have a grammatical dimension. There is shaky verb morphology: 'je veuz' (p. 21), 'je m'en fou' (p. 35), 't'aura' (p. 36), 't'embrasse' (p. 106), 'tu n'est pas' (p. 115). One error suggests ignorance of substantival gender: 'quelle boulot' (p. 43). Most concern adjectival agreement: 'ma chéri' (p. 28), 'Je suis ravi, monsieur, she tells me' (p. 46), 'whether they would be *vache* with him, or *chic*' (p. 47: the plural agreement on *vache* here is compulsory; on *chic* it is, admittedly, optional), 'ils sont impossible' (p. 61), 'ils sont sale' (p. 93), 'the street-boys of the quarter, whom he had once described to me as "lamentable"' (p. 131).

If most errors concern spelling and morphology – so, very much the *written* form of the language – there are some with an idiomatic or semantic dimension. Seeing some young men in a café, Guillaume becomes brighter and observes: '*Il y a les jeunes dedans*' (p. 44); idiomatic usage requires 'des' rather than 'les'. The narrator asks the waiter for two drinks '*avec beaucoup de la glace*' (p. 86). Idiomatic usage requires 'beaucoup de glace'. Giovanni tells the narrator there are plenty of other rooms the two of them could move to: '*Ca ne manque, les chambres*' (p. 104). Idiomatic usage requires the negative particle 'pas' after the verb. The narrator italicizes his use of the phrase 'double entendre', as if it were authentically French:

‘his eyes have somehow made of my last statement a *double entendre*’ (p. 52). But French does not use this phrase as English does, preferring ‘un double sens’. The narrator reports that ‘all standards had been debased by the *nouveau riche*’ (p. 47). The French phrase has certainly been adopted into English, but idiomatic usage requires that it be pluralized. Only once is the narrator’s French simply incomprehensible. He is evoking the good cheer of the people in the south. Even beneath a persistently gloomy sky, they say: ‘*Il fait beau bien?*’ (p. 57). They might ask, ‘*Il fait bien beau?*’ or even ‘*Il fait beau, hein?*’, but not what Baldwin makes them say.

Baldwin’s errors are not consistent. Many usages, idioms, and spellings are correct. Sometimes what is wrong at one point appears in a correct version elsewhere: so ‘*americain*’, missing its capital on p. 46, acquires it on p. 104 (though is still missing its accent). On p. 129, within the space of five lines, there is both ‘*Ca va*’ (minus cedilla) and ‘*C’est ça*’. The ellipsis in ‘*t’aura*’ (p. 36) suggests someone familiar with the patterns of contemporary spoken French, as does the quantity of everyday vocabulary and, most particularly, the number of vulgarisms. Baldwin’s errors, therefore, are, for the most part, those of someone more secure in spoken than in written French.

This point is quite evident in one exchange, which contains an elementary spelling error whilst making a relatively sophisticated point through the use of French. After he has made love in her apartment with his one-night stand Sue, she and the narrator finish their drinks:

She lifted her glass.

‘*A la votre*’, I said.

‘*A la votre?*’ she giggled. ‘*A la tienne, chéri!*’ She leaned over and kissed me on the mouth. (p. 90)

The error is the missing circumflex on ‘*vôte*’, making it an adjective rather than a pronoun. But Baldwin is meticulous in his manipulation of roman and italic type here to convey the stress that Sue uses when she repeats the narrator’s ‘*vôte*’ and emphatically corrects it to a ‘*tienne*’. Both are native speakers of English, but Baldwin gives them this French exchange so that he can exploit the French distinction between the polite and informal second-person forms. Sue uses a peculiarity of French usage to try to establish a more intimate relationship than the one the narrator has in mind. Even with imperfect French, Baldwin makes telling use of it.

Now, I made a point of saying that I have used the 2007 Penguin Books edition as the basis for these analyses. The question arises: is this edition particularly idiosyncratic and erratic in its handling of the French? A sample of earlier editions suggests that this is not the case. I have collated the first edition published in the USA (1956); the first edition published in the UK (1957); the third impression of that edition (1963); an edition published in the UK in 1984; and the 2007 Penguin Books edition.<sup>18</sup>

There is a remarkable consistency in the appearance of the French in the text in all editions consulted with the sole exception of the first UK edition. So, for instance, ‘*Une fine a l’eau*’ (p. 26) appears without the grave accent in 1956, 1963, 1984 and 2007. Similarly, ‘*ma cheri*’ (p. 28) appears without its acute accent and its feminine agreement, and ‘*veille folle*’ (p. 28) with its missing ‘*i*’ in these same

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<sup>18</sup> James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room* (New York: Dial Press, 1956; London: Michael Joseph, 1957; London: Michael Joseph, 1963; London: Black Swan, 1984).

editions. It is as if the same errors are simply repeated over the decades. One exception to this pattern is that the cedilla is more often correct in the 2007 edition than in the 1956, 1963 and 1984 editions: so, '*Ah, ça, mon cher*' (p. 50) in 2007 had appeared as '*ca*' in those earlier editions. In fact, every missing cedilla in those editions is correctly restored in the 2007 edition with the sole exception of '*ca va?*' (p. 129), which remains uncorrected, presumably by oversight. Another typical correction in the 2007 edition is that the narrator's use of the word '*habitués*' correctly incorporates the acute accent (e.g. p. 69), whereas in those earlier editions the accent was missing. These few exceptions apart, the 2007 edition reproduces the errors found in the 1956, 1963 and 1984 editions.

Unique amongst all the editions I have consulted is the 1957 edition, the first edition published in the UK. This edition almost systematically corrects the erratic French that had appeared in the 1956 edition published in the USA. So, in the 1957 edition, '*Une fine à l'eau*' appears with its grave accent (p. 44), '*ma chérie*' with its acute accent and feminine agreement (p. 47), and '*vieille folle*' correctly spelt (p. 47). It is not only spelling and accentuation that the 1957 edition corrects, but verb morphology as well: in this edition alone, for example, the verbs in '*Je m'en fous*' (p. 58) and '*T'auras*' (p. 58) have the correct endings. This edition makes other corrections, which may help non-Francophone readers. In all other editions, the sentence 'He lives in a dreadful street, near *Nation*' (2007, p. 40), might seem rather puzzling to the uninitiated with its italicized word '*Nation*'. The 1957 edition glosses this with the phrase 'near place de la Nation' (p. 65). We can only speculate about the reasons explaining the correctness of the French in the 1957 edition. It seems likely that the publisher, Michael Joseph, employed a copy-editor or proof-reader who was very proficient in French and took it upon themselves to make corrections. What is

more difficult to explain is why, when the same publisher printed further editions, like the 1963 edition, all the 1957 corrections disappeared and the errors that featured in the 1956 American edition return.

Anna Bogic tells an interesting story of disagreements and battles between Howard Parshley, the author of the first and much criticized English translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe*, and the publisher Alfred A. Knopf.<sup>19</sup> It may be that similar battles between Michael Joseph, the Dial Press and Baldwin himself explain the different states of the French in the UK editions of 1957 and 1963, but I have found no archival evidence to support such speculation.

Given that the state of the French in the first American edition has, except for the strikingly correct first UK edition, pretty much determined how the French would appear in all subsequent editions, how much is Baldwin himself, and how much are his first editors, responsible for the French in the text? There are no autograph manuscripts of the novel. Baldwin seems to have composed directly onto a typewriter. His archive, in the Harlem branch of the New York Public Libraries, contains two complete and three partial typescripts of the novel.<sup>20</sup> The most interesting of these for the purposes of understanding the appearance of the French in print is the typescript he originally submitted to the Dial Press for comment (papers b.14f.1). This is the richest typescript because it contains manuscript comments from a reader or copyeditor, which often pertain to Baldwin's French.

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<sup>19</sup> Anna Bogic, 'The Story of the First English Translation of Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* and Why It Still Matters', *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 26 (2009–2010), 81–93.

<sup>20</sup> Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture, James Baldwin papers b.14f.1–5.

A key thing that emerges from consulting this typescript is that some of the recurrent errors in the French of the published editions can be attributed to his use of a non-French keyboard. His typewriter had no accents. Sometimes the accents are added by hand, sometimes not. So, in the typescript, '*Bien sûr*' is correctly accentuated (p. 107) and this same accent is retained in all printed editions. But the circumflex is missing in '*Vous n'etes pas malade?*' (p. 100) and the error is repeated in all printed editions except for the 1957 UK edition, which correctly prints '*êtes*' (p. 91). It is mostly, but not systematically, the case that the accentuation in this typescript is the accentuation that is printed in most editions. Sometimes the typescript has erratic accentuation added by hand, which subsequently appears in its correct form in all printed editions: for instance, '*mêchant*' in the typescript (p. 119) appears in print as '*méchant*' (p. 71 in the 2007 edition). Occasionally the typescript adds accentuation which is omitted in all printed editions: for instance, in the phrase 'towards the cafés of Montparnasse', the acute accent is added by hand in the typescript (p. 143), but is omitted in all printed editions, presumably on the grounds that editors have deemed it to be an English word in the narrative context (p. 125 in the 2007 edition).

Some other errors may also be explained by the fact that Baldwin was typing. The question '*Il fait beau bien?*' (2007 edition, p. 57) does not sound French at all, and yet it appears like this in all printed editions, including the generally correct UK 1957 edition. The typescript is illuminating, however. It emerges that Baldwin wanted the phrase to read, colloquially, '*Il fait beau hein?*', but that is not what he first typed. Instead of 'h' he accidentally typed 'a'. Realising his mistake, he overtyped 'h'. But an 'h' over an 'a' looks like a 'b'. So, this word appears in the typescript as 'bein' (p. 98). At first glance, this looks like a typographical error for 'bien', which may explain

why, in the only other complete typescript of the novel in the archive (b.14.f2), this word is straightforwardly typed as ‘bien’ (p. 72). The archive catalogue dates this other typescript as 1964, but without any evidence. It may be tempting to think that it is a fair copy of the typescript containing editorial annotations, and it may be so, but it is not the case that it is systematically closer to the printed versions of the text than the earlier typescript. For instance, ‘*Vive l’Amérique*’ appears correctly in the supposedly later typescript (p. 40), but it appears as ‘*Vive l’amerique*’ (without capitalization or accentuation) in the annotated typescript (p. 52) and in all printed editions (p. 33 in the 2007 edition) except the first UK edition, where it appears as ‘*Vive l’Amérique*’ (p. 54). On the other hand, it is not the case that the possibly later typescript is *generally* correct and closer to the 1957 UK edition: ‘*M’sieu, l’américain!*’ appears in both typescripts without capitalisation or accentuation (b.14.f1, p. 98; b.14.f2, p. 72) and, similarly, in all editions (e.g., p. 57 in the 2007 edition) with the exception of the 1957 UK edition, where it is, correctly, ‘*M’sieu, l’Américain!*’ (p. 89).

The annotated typescript reveals far more about Baldwin’s use of French than can be ascertained from any printed edition. It above all reveals that he originally intended the text to contain far more French than it eventually did. The person commenting on the text was clearly anxious about the amount and comprehensibility of the French. The marginal comment ‘Translate’ occurs more than once (e.g. p. 56, p. 59) and there are injunctions like ‘French phrases should be translated’ (p. 71). Here is a passage, as subsequently printed, that had much more French in the version originally submitted to the publisher:

‘Me, I want to escape,’ he had told me, ‘*je veuz m’evader* – this dirty world, this dirty body. I wish never to make love again with anything more than the body.’ (2007 edition, p. 21)

In the annotated typescript this same passage reads:

‘Me, I want to escape,’ he had told me, ‘*je veux m’evader* – this dirty world, this dirty body. *Jamais plus dans la vie je ne ferai l’amour d’une façon personnelle, jamais.*’ (p. 30)

In the typescript, ‘veux’ is correctly spelled, as it is in the early editions, becoming erratic only in later editions (from 1984 according to my own sampling). In the typescript the apostrophe before ‘amour’ and the cedilla have been inserted by hand. Crucially, the typescript contains this marginal comment: ‘Will you translate enough of this to give the sense?’ (p. 30). The result is that Baldwin deleted the long French sentence and substituted an English paraphrase.

This is not an isolated occurrence. In the typescript, after this exchange:

‘*Je m’en fou.*’

‘*Fous-moi la paix, donc, je t’en prie*’ (p. 56)

the commentator has written in the margin ‘Translate’. Baldwin obliges and the printed version reads:

‘*Je m’en fou.*’

‘Then please get the hell away from me’ (p. 35).

The morphological error (instead of the correct ‘*fous*’) is consistent in all versions apart from the 1957 UK edition.

Baldwin does not always oblige, however. The commentator wrote ‘French phrases should be translated’ at this point in the typescript:

‘They always have the face clean, *mais, mon Dieu, les fesses!*’ He grinned.

‘*Fais-moi confiance.*’ (p. 71)

On this occasion, Baldwin retains the French and does not even offer a paraphrase. Perhaps he took a decision to spare his non-francophone readers the vulgarity ‘*fesses*’.

In fact, sensitivity to the delicacy of his original readership may explain other choices evident when we read the typescript alongside the published version. In the typescript, Baldwin writes: ‘This city is fucking expensive’ (p. 178). The commentator crosses out ‘fucking’ and asks: ‘A different word, perhaps?’. Baldwin did not provide a different word but omits ‘fucking’ in all published versions. In a similar vein, he writes in the typescript: ‘You people dumped all this shit on us’ (p. 49). The commentator asks: ‘Change word?’. Again Baldwin obliges and this time French comes to the rescue. He keeps the word but gives its French equivalent: ‘You people dumped all this *merde* on us’ (p. 31 in the 2007 edition). He is not always willing to play ball, however. In the typescript, ‘tasting our wine and shitting on us’ elicits the comment: ‘another word!’ (p. 216). But this time Baldwin neither deletes the offending word nor substitutes a French equivalent. The phrase remains in all published versions (p. 123 in the 2007 edition).

David Leeming claims that Baldwin ‘would react with particular favour to James Silberman, his first editor at Dial’ and that Silberman was ‘a man Baldwin respected for his intelligent suggestions by mail in connection with *Giovanni’s Room*.<sup>21</sup> It may be that the detailed annotations in this typescript are those of James Silberman. With a few exceptions, Baldwin acted on them. The annotator of the typescript was not in the business of correcting Baldwin’s French but certainly had a

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<sup>21</sup> Leeming, *Baldwin*, p. 116, p. 137.

decisive role in making an essentially bilingual novel more comprehensible to non-francophone readers. The annotator was also responsible for removing some of Baldwin's vulgarisms and, indirectly, for causing them to be expressed in French.<sup>22</sup>

### *French Translation*

Jacques Derrida is thought to be the first to have asked: 'How is a text written in several languages at a time to be translated?'<sup>23</sup> Responding to Derrida's question, Leo Tak-Hung Chan explains that 'when more readers as well as writers are likely to be at least bilingual, and translators have to accept and adapt to the new linguistic environment, translation theory cannot but be radically transformed'.<sup>24</sup> He asks the open question: 'what is the point of *telling* the reader [of a translation] that a certain word or phrase is German (or French or Italian) in the original?' (p. 61). So, what is the French translator of *Giovanni's Room* to do with the narrator's frequent self-conscious use of French words and phrases in a predominantly English text?

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<sup>22</sup> For an overview of genetic criticism and its basis for a new approach to translation studies, see Anthony Cordingley and Chiara Montini, 'Genetic Translation Studies: An Emerging Discipline', *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, 14 (2015), 1-18.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', translated by Joseph F. Graham, in Joseph F. Graham (ed.), *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 165–248 (p. 171).

<sup>24</sup> Leo Tak-Hung Chan, 'Translating Bilinguality in the Post-Babelian Era', *The Translator*, 8.1 (2002), 49–72 (p. 50).

To explore this question, we can usefully bear in mind a key concern of translation theorists. Lawrence Venuti has made a decisive intervention in the perennial debate as to whether translations should be what he calls domesticating or foreignizing, that is to say whether they should look like an original and fluent piece of writing in the translated language and for the receiving culture (so obscuring, making invisible the work of the translator) or whether they should consciously indicate to readers, semantically, stylistically or otherwise, that they are translations from a language and culture different from the translated ones (so throwing into prominence the work of the translator).<sup>25</sup> Venuti's account of the history of translation shows how predominant the domesticating tendency has been (and remains) and his closing chapter, 'Call to action', aims to promote a critical awareness of the potential of foreignization and of making the work of the translator visible, whilst also recognizing that 'foreignizing translation is beset with risks'.<sup>26</sup> Crucially, printed in his own bold type for the avoidance of ambiguity, is his recognition that 'all translation [...], including translation that seeks to register linguistic and cultural differences, is an interpretation that fundamentally domesticates the source text'.<sup>27</sup>

Examining how Élisabeth Guinsbourg has met the challenge of dealing with Baldwin's French in her translation *La Chambre de Giovanni* offers compelling evidence in support of Venuti's insights. She is acutely aware of the problems she

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<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018). First edition 1995; second edition 2008. The 2018 text is a reprint of the 2008 edition and includes a new introduction (pp. viii-xix) from which I quote.

<sup>26</sup> Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 273.

<sup>27</sup> Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. xii.

faces because she explicitly addresses them by typographic means, as she signals in a footnote: ‘Les mots ou phrases en italique suivis d’un astérisque sont en français dans le texte. (*N.d.T.*)’ (p. 37). This note explicitly makes the translator visible to readers and tells them that in the original English text there were words and phrases in French that will be retained in the translation. This, it appears, will be a foreignizing translation. Italics and asterisks will be used to show clearly to readers the extent of the bilingualism in Baldwin’s original text. The translator’s note, however, turns out to be highly misleading. Even if it gives the impression that Baldwin’s original French words and phrases have been italicized in the translation, it does not strictly claim that *all* his French words have been italicized. What is hidden to the reader of the translation is that most of the original French has *not* in fact been italicized in the translation. So, readers of the translation cannot, despite the impression given in the footnote, know the extent of the bilingualism in *Giovanni’s Room*. We cannot know why the translator has been highly and, it seems, randomly selective about what has been italicized; the cause may simply be inattention. But, in this, we see how easily foreignization can turn into domestication. In fact, an underlying drive to domesticate is most obviously evident in the way the translator sometimes changes Baldwin’s French, correcting blatant errors of grammar, spelling, and idiom, and sometimes changing the ‘tone’ of a word or phrase.

The translator corrects Baldwin’s spelling and grammar. So we have: ‘je veux m’évader’ (p. 40), ‘A la vôtre’ (p. 51), ‘*séparation de corps\**’ (p. 65), ‘*quel boulot\**’ (p. 73), ‘l’Américain’ (p. 78), ‘Je suis ravie’ (p. 78), ‘ils sont impossibles’ (p. 101). The translator is indeed scrupulously attentive in this regard. So, when Baldwin’s narrator asks, in the original, for ‘Deux ricards’, the translator’s narrator asks for ‘Deux Ricard’ (p. 138), with capitalization of the brand and, because it is a brand, no

pluralization. The French reader would therefore have no sense that they were reading an originally bilingual text written by an American writer *with shaky French*.

In similar vein, the translator also corrects Baldwin's use of idiom and his occasional confusions or obfuscations. So, in the translation, the original '*nouveau riche*' (p. 47) is rendered '*nouveaux riches*\*' (p. 80). Whereas in the original Giovanni comments on the American sense of time with the claim 'Time always sounds like a parade *chez vous*' (p. 30), the translation, more idiomatically, substitutes 'pour vous' (p. 54). Baldwin's narrator says that a woman shouted 'a particularly vivid *cochonnerie*' to Giovanni (p. 42); but this is an improper use of the word 'cochonnerie' and the translator rephrases the sentence: '[...] *infectiva Giovanni [...]* d'une manière particulièrement grossière' (p. 72). For Baldwin's incomprehensible '*Il fait beau bien*' (p. 57), the translator substitutes 'Il fait beau, hein?' (p. 94). Similarly, the translator identifies the game played in the fields of southern France as 'pétanque' (p. 95), more plausible than Baldwin's '*pelote*' (p. 57).<sup>28</sup> Everything is done to make Baldwin's French sound native rather than foreign.

Sometimes the narrator makes changes or omissions which have an impact on the tone or sense. Giovanni makes a sardonic remark about children to Jacques. In the

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<sup>28</sup> Baldwin's annotated typescript (p. 99) and all the earlier editions have '*belote*', which is simply wrong. It is a card game, which does not need the 'flat field' that Baldwin's text says was used for the game (p. 57 in the 2007 edition). Later editions made the 'correction' to '*pelote*', which is a Basque ball game needing a wall (rather than a flat field). The translator is no doubt right to suppose that 'pétanque' is what Baldwin intended, and the only word that would make any sense to her French readers here.

original he says: 'They go through a period, all too brief, *hélas!* when a pig is perhaps the *only* animal they do not call to mind' (p. 40). In the translation he says: 'Ils passent par une période trop brève, où le cochon est précisément le seul animal auquel ils ne font pas penser' (p. 70). The translator has not retained the interjection 'hélas!', which in the original serves not only to remind the reader that Giovanni is to be presumed to be speaking French, but also to characterize him as camp and witty. Without it, it is flat. The translator may think that 'hélas' is an unlikely word in a modern French mouth. But this domesticating tendency seems deaf to the way in which Baldwin uses French here to gesture towards his character's sexuality.

There is a similar loss of wit in another omission that the translator makes. When David writes to his father asking for money, he says, in the original: '*Now will you send your loving son some of his hard-earned money. Tout de suite. That's French for pronto.*' (p. 110). But the translation reads: '*Alors, est-ce que tu vas envoyer à ton fils adoré son argent, gagné à la sueur de son front? Tout de suite.*' (p. 176). The fact that 'tout de suite' no longer stands out as being in a different language and the fact that the final sentence, translating 'tout de suite' as 'pronto' for an American reader, is omitted, leads to a loss of humour and makes the David of the translation sound much more peremptory in his demand for cash. The translator's omission of the verbal play may be due to no more than a desire to avoid a tricky problem, but the effect is again one of normalization or domestication.

On one occasion, the translator seems simply to misunderstand Baldwin's French and attempts, quite inappropriately, to make a correction. When, in the original, Sue tries to seduce the narrator into an intimate relationship by linguistic means, the only error to be corrected is the missing circumflex. The narrator says: '*A*

*la votre*’; she repeats ‘*A la votre?*’ and then, daringly, corrects to ‘*A la tienne, chéri!*’ (p. 90). But this linguistic seduction is entirely lost in the translation:

À la tienne, dis-je.

- À la tienne? (Elle gloussa) À la tienne, chéri! (p. 144)

Turning all three possessive pronouns into the same form makes nonsense of the exchange, since Sue would have no need to question the narrator’s initial use of ‘*tienne*’.

How does the translator deal with that particular feature of Baldwin’s writing that entails giving his own deft English translations of some of the French words and phrases that he uses? The habit is clearly intended to help an anglophone readership that may not understand all the French. In fact, the translator usually retains and translates Baldwin’s English translations of his own French, and there are therefore consequences for how these passages strike the readers of the French translation. So, the original ‘*Il est dangereux, tu sais. And for a boy like you – he is very dangerous*’ (p. 35) becomes ‘*Il est dangereux, tu sais. Et pour un garçon comme toi, il est très dangereux*’ (p. 61). Similarly, ‘*Ils sont sale [sic], les gens, tu sais. [...] They are just dirty, all of them.*’ (p. 93) becomes ‘*Ils sont sales, les gens, tu sais\*? [...] Ils sont sales tous*’ (p. 149). This is the translator’s standard practice. The effect is inevitably different from that in the original. No longer a linguistic aid for the anglophone reader, the repetitions serve in the translation to suggest emphatic speech. Very occasionally, the translator departs from the practice, and this is probably when she feels that it would be implausible to emphasize the word translated by Baldwin in the original by repeating it in the French translation. So, Baldwin’s ‘*Et le rouquin la! What’s the redhead drinking?*’ (p. 51) becomes ‘*Et le rouquin, là? Qu’est-ce qu’il boit?*’ (p. 85). Presumably the translator feels that the repetition of ‘*rouquin*’ in the

second phrase would be both clumsy and redundant; and there is no obvious synonym. In one final and curious example of the phenomenon of repeating Baldwin's English translation of a French phrase the translator creates a particularly striking effect and gives a false impression of the original. Giovanni uses some foul language to comment to David about others in the bar: 'Ah! *Les encules!* The dirty sons-of-bitches! *Les gonzesses!*' (p. 97). Presumably the non-anglophone Giovanni uses the first and last of these terms of abuse; and the middle one is inserted by Baldwin to give his non-francophone readers a flavour of their meaning. In the translation this becomes: 'Ah, *les enculés\**! Ah, *les salopards\**! *Les gonzesses\**!' (p. 155). By using italics and asterisks for all three terms, the translator gives the reader the (false) impression that all three terms appear in French in the original.

The attentive reader will have noticed that in some of the quotations from the translation above italics and asterisks are used, and in others not. In fact, despite claiming to signal in the translation, by typographic means, words and phrases that appear in Baldwin's original in French, the translator does so only very selectively. The result is that the French reader has little sense of the extent of the bilingualism of the original. When David uses a French word in his narrative, this is sometimes italicized in the translation: 'La plupart des gens que je connaissais faisaient partie du *milieu\**' (p. 37) and '[Il] buvait un *vin chaud\**' (p. 39). But most of the time the narrator's French usages, signalled by italics in the original and demonstrating his bilingualism, are assimilated into the roman type of the translator's French: 'la connivence de Guillaume, le patron' (p. 42); 'Ce bar se trouvait pratiquement dans mon quartier' (p. 44); '[Je] buvais du vin rouge avec eux au tabac' (p. 95). In the original these phrases were of course in English, but the words 'patron', 'quartier' and 'tabac' were in French and in italics, suggesting to the reader something of the

anglophone narrator's engagement with a French linguistic culture. The translator gave herself the means to convey this in the translation but has mostly not done so. The potential for foreignization offered by the system of italics and asterisks has been forgotten in preference for domestication – a lost opportunity to signal the foreignness of the narrator, which is central to the novel.

The same goes for the dialogues. Occasionally an original French word is signalled by italics and an asterisk in the translation, as when Giovanni says, 'Ils ont toujours la figure propre, *mais, mon Dieu, les fesses\*!*' (p.74). And, more importantly, the translator makes it clear that the anglophone Hella greets David in French on stepping off the train: '*t'embrasse pas ta femme\*?*' (p. 169) (though here, unusually, the translator fails to correct the verb ending). More often than not, however, the original French used in dialogues is not signalled in the translation: 'On mange ici, non?' (p. 87); or it is sometimes only partially signalled: 'Tiens, dit-elle, moqueuse, *sans blague\*?*' (p. 77), where, in the original, both 'sans blague' and 'tiens' appear in French and in italics. The inconsistent adoption of the italicization policy that the translator advertises in her footnote is particularly unfortunate when it fails to show French readers that anglophone characters sometimes use French when communicating with each other, as a deliberately playful or seductive strategy. This is what happens at the beginning of the letter that Hella writes to David from Spain. In the original it reads: '*Mon cher*, she began, *Spain is my favourite country* mais ça n'empêche que Paris est toujours ma ville préférée' (p. 83). It being a letter, the use of roman and italics is reversed, except that the opening salutation has been put in italic type, whereas roman might have been expected. It is clear, however, that Hella is enthusiastically mingling French and English. In the translation, this is lost: '*Mon cher David* (commençait-elle), *j'adore l'Espagne, mais ça n'empêche que Paris est*

*toujours ma ville préférée*' (p. 132). The translation signals the fact that it is a letter by adopting italics, but does not revert to roman for the words originally written in French. The French reader, therefore, has no sense of Hella's ludic bilingualism, assuming possibly that all this was originally expressed in English. Leo Tak-Hung says that 'if each language depicts things in one world, then there are two worlds in a bilingual text'.<sup>29</sup> In any strategies they adopt, therefore, translators of bilingual novels ought probably to reveal rather than obscure the two worlds in play.

### *Conclusion*

There has been a surge of interest in bilingualism or multilingualism in modern literature. In addition to the work of Meir Sternberg, Mark Sebba, and others, Laura Lonsdale has written on some modern Spanish manifestations of language alternation, and Jahan Ramazani on its impact on modern anglophone poetry.<sup>30</sup> Writers are quick to make links between multilingualism and modernity. Ramazani writes: 'Although creolization, hybridization, and the like are often regarded as exotic or multicultural sideshows to literary histories of formal advancement or the growth of discreet national poetics, these cross-cultural dynamics are arguably among the engines of modern and contemporary poetic development and innovation'.<sup>31</sup> Baldwin's use of French in a novel written for an anglophone readership, coupled with his explicitly

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<sup>29</sup> Tak-Hung Chan, 'Translating Bilinguality', p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Lonsdale, *Multilingualism and Modernity: Barbarisms in Spanish and American Literature* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, pp. 2-3.

homosexual subject matter, may well have been a significant marker of the novel's innovativeness as a cultural artefact.

It is all the more interesting, therefore, to inquire into mechanisms by which so much French is incorporated into a novel in English. Baldwin may have wanted it to evoke a convincing French and culturally bilingual context for his possibly non-francophone readers. It is therefore interesting to see him privilege simple words and phrases and to observe how, when using more complex phrases, he deftly incorporates explanatory glosses into his English. It is even more interesting to realise the role his original publisher had in tempering the amount of French incorporated into the text, and, in the process, to see how Baldwin exploited French as a way of including vulgarisms that he would not have got away with in English. Given the evident importance of French to his project, it seems entirely appropriate rather than churlish to inquire into the accuracy of the French he deploys to evoke a French environment for his readers and surprising to discover not only how inaccurate it is, but how inaccurate it has remained despite many editions and the inevitable input of publishers. In this context, it is particularly surprising to discover that the first UK edition of the text corrected most of the French but seems to have been quickly forgotten in favour of reproductions of the version with erratic French. Finally, given the transnational nature of the text, it seems entirely appropriate to ask how the text is handled in translation, and particularly translation into French. Whilst the French translator starts scrupulously by wanting to indicate to her readers those parts of the text that were originally in French rather than English, she somehow, perhaps by oversight or an unspoken commitment to domesticating translation, ends up masking how much of the text was originally in French and how inaccurate that French was. Bilingualism and multilingualism test authors, readers and publishers alike, and can

very easily, and especially in translation, undermine the verisimilitude that, on one level, they are trying to create.<sup>32</sup>

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